

Notes on the Abbey Road mic test sessions of June 2, 2008

These are just brief notes to make certain points clear. Full notes and analysis will be available in the Audio Masterclass Music Production and Sound Engineering Course.

Relevance of tests

No microphone test can ever be definitive. There is no one 'best' microphone. Selection of microphones should be made on the basis of what sounds best on the actual session. However, pre-selection of candidate microphones is usually done on the basis of experience. Using as many microphones as possible and listening to tests such as these is essential to gain the necessary experience for effective microphone selection.

Studio

All recordings were made in Abbey Road Studio 3 on June 2, 2008. These are Audio Masterclass recordings made using Abbey Road's facility. All engineering decisions were made or approved by Audio Masterclass.

Microphone tests

Priority was given to doing the tests quickly so that the vocals could be as consistent as possible. It was found by experiment that the best way to do this was to line up the microphones and have the vocalist move from one to another. This precluded the use of a vocal booth or acoustic screens. You will hear air conditioning noise in the background of these files, at a level that is typical for this studio.

Backing tracks

The backing tracks are all 'skeleton' tracks, made specifically for the purpose of carrying out these tests efficiently. They are not intended to represent fully arranged productions.

Levels

On a few occasions you may hear changes in levels during files. This is due to fader-riding by the Abbey Road assistant engineer. At no point did either the microphone preamplifiers (in the SSL J-Series console) or the convertors (Prism) clip. Any distortion or electronically-generated noise that you hear is an artefact of the microphones and preamplifiers under test.

Error in the backing track

There is an error in the editing of one of the backing tracks. This was not corrected as it would have slowed the session down. It did not affect the vocal performance.

Videos

The videos are in 'reality' style so as not to affect any aspect of the audio recording. When the singers perform, you will hear the signals from the microphones you see. When the singers are not actively performing, you will hear the soundtrack from one of the cameras.

In the preamp test, the two preamps feed the left and right channels of the stereo soundtrack of the video. The Avalon M5 is always on the left channel. You will hear some instability in stereo image as the singer moves. This would not be normal usage of microphones for a video soundtrack but it was made this way in this instance as it provides more information about the session.

AAC encoding

If you have downloaded the audio files in AAC format, you will need the capability to play AAC audio with the file extension .m4a. Apple iTunes can do this, and convert to .wav if you wish. There is a plug-in for Windows Media Player available at <http://www.orban.com/plugin/>